

MASTER OF ARTS IN INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND CIVIL MILITARY RELATIONS

THE KEY ROLE OF NATO ACCESSION ON POLAND'S DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

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The accession of Poland into NATO in the spring of 1999 raises the question of how western attempts to transfer democratic institutions to new democracies in central Europe operated in reality as concerns reform and reaction. Among the obstacles to this process was a western ignorance about domestic social challenges and political conflicts. These go hand in hand with the process of democratic transition and show themselves starkly in the case of Polish politics, society and military institutions in the years before 1999.

While transitioning to democracy, Poland experienced two types of threats: one from civilian politicians who tried to use the military to accomplish their political goals, and another from military officers with political ambitions. After the collapse of communism in 1989, Polish military forces remained highly visible in domestic politics for almost a decade and the issue of civil-military relations was at the center of government crises on three occasions.

Democratic civilian control over the military, a requirement to join NATO, became one of the primary political goals of an overwhelming majority of Polish elites since society saw the membership as the best guarantee of national security and a peaceful future. Politicians and government officials who didn't accept or understand this determination were eventually voted out, dismissed, or now exist on the fringes of political life. NATO's plan for Poland to move toward full membership in the alliance resulted in a peaceful democratic transition.

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